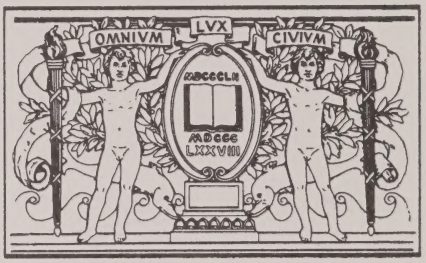
OLD FASHIONED FOLK

F. HOPKINSON SMITH



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BY

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A PLEA FOR THE SIMPLER LIFE

OF FORMER TIMES

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OLD FASHIONED FOLK

MY memory goes back some forty years to a small room lighted by wax candles and the blaze of an open wood fire. There is a table on which rests a work-basket and some books. Other books in cases line the walls from floor to ceiling. A sweet young granddaughter, with a rose at her throat, sits at the piano in the darkened corner, running her fingers over the keys.

Beside the table is a rocking-chair, and within reach of the cheery blaze sits a woman. Her hair is gray, — a silver-gray, with a satin sheen where the light strikes; her skin is soft and fresh; about her shoulders is a gossamer scarf breaking the line of the simple

dress, which is fastened close up to the throat. Now and then she lays down her knitting and half closes her eyes, listening the more intently to the music that ripples beneath the girl's hands.

Soon the door opens and the slender figure of a man, with his spectacles pushed high up on his forehead, enters. He walks to her chair, slips his hand with a loving pat under her chin, and takes the seat beside her. She raises her face, and a light breaks over it. She has known the touch of that hand for forty years.

Everywhere is the atmosphere of the home, — the softened lights, the cheery blaze of the logs, the quiet, the restfulness, the joy of close companionship. More than anything else there broods the spirit of contentment, — a contentment that the wealth of the Indies cannot buy.

With this picture clear in my mind there comes another, — one I saw at the opera some few weeks ago. Nordica was singing, and the house was packed to the roof.

"A very brilliant scene," remarked the woman on my left, sweeping the auditorium with her opera-glass. "Every seat is full, and every box crowded except old Mrs. Millions's. There she is now! Who's that with her? Oh, yes, — her granddaughter. Elise looks lovely in white, don't you think so?" and she handed me her glass.

I readjusted the lenses, and followed the direction indicated by her head. Elise certainly did look lovely in white.

The young girl, however, did not interest me. It was her grandmother that absorbed my attention. Through the shimmer of flashing lights and

across the flower-bed of white gowns and pink shoulders in full bloom, I could not realize that her son was near my own age and that her grandson had gone to school with my boy. Her poise was that of a woman who was perfectly at home in any and all atmospheres.

Her dress suited the occasion, and was of the latest mode; throat and neck bare, a string of pearls and an edging of lace softening the skin, a spray of diamonds surmounting a head of hair as black as it was at twenty. Every few minutes during the entr'-acte new figures would appear, their white shirt-fronts rose-coloured in the softened light. Grandmother and granddaughter were equally gracious, but the grandmother received the most attention, especially from the younger men — just grown, most of them.

" On the lookout for invitations for

her balls," my lady of the opera-glasses whispered to me from behind her fan. I made no answer. I didn't believe it, — not all of it. I was still studying the tightly drawn skin and deep shadows under the eyes, the thin, semi-transparent ears, the series of undulating hollows that lay over the wide expanse between the pearls and the edging of lace.

Now and then, even at this distance, I detected without the aid of my merciless glass, an expression of weariness cross her face, which lingered for a moment like a shadow or cleared when some one of her guests spoke to her.

At midnight I saw her again. She was standing in the lower lobby waiting for her carriage. Her liveried footman had brought a heavy fur wrap, which he had hung about her neck. This she drew closer as she stood shivering by the ever-swinging door,

her bare shoulders half covered, her poor thin ankles chilled to their brittle bones.

These two pictures always follow one another in my mind, and with them this question: What has come over our social conditions in the last fifty years to produce this change? Why should the mother and grandmother of to-day turn her back upon the sweet, reposeful life of the mother and grandmother of the sixties and affect the life of a young married woman of twenty? Is it because she alone could educate the granddaughter to take her place in the sphere of life to which she was born, and which modern conditions require her to fill? Or was the home which she had left behind her a few hours before so dull and companionless, so devoid of comforts, despite its luxuries, that she preferred the glare of the opera-house to her own fireside? Or was it because she had

set her pace earlier in life, and it bored her to put on the brakes as she grew older? What has happened, I repeat, to our civilization, and through what degrees of degeneracy has it fallen, that this type of mother is so seldom found in what is called the higher circles of our social life? How is it that this low-voiced, gentle woman, shrinking from publicity, her fireside her rostrum, her children and husband her religion, nursing the sick, — not with her check-book, but with her own gentle hands, — thoughtful of her friends, hospitable to the stranger, merciful to her servants, ready to praise, speaking ill of no one, her highest ambition to maintain the traditions of her blood, — how is it, I say, that this old-fashioned woman has been so largely supplanted?

Once more let me flash on the screen

of my talk two other contrasting pictures drawn from the home and home life of this woman of the past and this woman of the present.

In the old days every drawing-room door was open wide on any night of the week to whoever might call. If the table was full at meal-time the old butler could always squeeze in a place for one more, or, if this was impossible, some neighbour and his wife would always draw up outside the circle, or wait in the drawing-room until the meal was over, to take their places later at a rubber of whist, or perhaps to listen to a quartette in which the father and daughters took part. No one had to ask whether it was convenient, — no one was invited two weeks ahead. Even as late as ten o'clock the old brass knocker would continue to respond to the hands of welcome guests, the sound bringing the old butler to

the door on the run, where he would bend low until they were ushered into his master's presence. Not the hired butler for the night, or for the season, but one who had served his master and his master's people from his boyhood, who had carried every child on his back, and whose pride in the family name was as great as his master's.

Nor were the young people's pleasures forgotten. Almost every night during the winter there was a dance somewhere, or a game of blind man's buff, with all the mahogany chairs and big sofas moved back, the old people taking their share of the frolic.

At eleven everybody went home, the young men and young girls escorting each other, leaving the older people first; no fear of footpads, and no need for chaperones. Every young girl was the sister of every young man so far as protection was concerned. His re-

sponsibility to her mother was only equalled by his responsibility to himself. The traditional millstone hanging about the neck of the offender of little ones would be light in weight compared to his load, and the depths of the sea a welcome oblivion if he infringed one hair's breadth. A young man who could not be trusted with the night-key and the daughter could not hope for social recognition of any kind.

In contrast to the life of this home and its open, welcoming hospitality, let us ring the front door-bell of one of our equally representative mansions on any one of our principal avenues.

If we have been invited two weeks in advance and arrive exactly on the minute, we will be welcome. On entering, the butler, after removing our coat and hat, hands us a tiny white envelope containing a card upon which is written the name of the lady whom

we are to have the honour of escorting to dinner. Our host and hostess expect us. They are both standing on the rug beside the gas-log fire, or at the other end of the drawing-room, under the hired palms. We shake hands and are introduced to some one within reach, — our lady of the envelope, it may be, or some one else, — it makes no difference to the hostess. Other guests enter; half of them — perhaps all of them — have never met before; some of them never want to meet again.

Dinner is announced by the drawing of the curtains, or the profound bow of the high-priced functionary, and we file in and arrange ourselves about a table that represents the product of half the globe. In its centre is a hedge of roses circled about by candelabra and candle-shades that serve as an impenetrable screen, shielding from view your host and hostess, with whom you have

not exchanged half a dozen words, and will not, probably, during the whole evening. Conversation is restricted to your fellow sufferers on your right and left. This you do impartially as you can, the woman on your right being "up" in literature, with a leaning toward Shelley and Keats, and the woman on your left loving nothing so much as collie dogs and Angora cats. You try to be just in your attentions and not get the two topics mixed, but the strain ruins your dinner.

When the last course is served, you rise with the others, conduct your partner to the drawing-room, and are shown by another high-priced functionary into a third room, where you smoke.

The conversation now extends to the man whose bald head you caught shining between the candles, and to the gentleman who craned his head around the roses to speak to you. You never

met any of them before, but this only enhances the excitement.

When you return to the drawing-room you discover, to your surprise, that a great change has taken place in its interior fittings. Where the hostess received her guests there has been erected a portable platform on which are grouped a quartette of negro minstrels, or perhaps it supports a sleight-of-hand artist, or a comic singer. This form of entertainment has been provided in the full knowledge of the fact that you are unable to entertain yourself, nor can any one of your companions. To ask you to help entertain the company would be an unpardonable breach of good taste and quite out of the question, — one which any gentleman or lady would resent, they not being " professionals." At eleven o'clock your carriage is announced and you go home.

A week later you again ring the bell, hand the butler your card, and retire. The only uncomfortable feeling you have is the fear of meeting some one of the family on the front steps who might invite you in. The incident is now closed.

Continuing the comparisons along these lines, let me bring to your mind the business man of the old days. One, a man of fifty when I knew him (I a boy less than twenty), lived in one of the upper parts of the town, and about ten New York blocks from his office. The street was like any other city street, the houses in rows on both sides, in which resided his neighbours. From the curb in front of this old-time mansion, protected by a wooden tree-box, rose a mighty elm. Under this elm stood his saddle-horse in the morning, when he rode down to his office, at lunch-time

and at night, when he returned again. This fact is impressed upon my memory, for I often rode the horse back to the stable, — a great treat to me.

The house had wide steps, with an old colonial door and knocker, and iron railings with brass knobs. The pavement was of brick; the street paved with cobbles. In summer the old servant kept the bricks and cobbles wet with a hose, giving the patient horse a foot-bath once in awhile. This sprinkling and drenching was to make a cool spot for the master to sit in after the day's work was done, — say five o'clock, rarely so late as six. On his dismounting in the late afternoon and the horse taken to the stable, an easy chair was brought out and placed on the clean, scoured steps, and later the master would appear in a light seersucker or black alpaca coat, — the afternoon paper in his hand, — or perhaps

with the arm of one of his daughters about his neck, she, dressed in white, with some bit of colour at her throat and waist. Every passing neighbour stopped and had a word either with him or the dear wife by his side, or the daughter — the girl's arm still about her father's neck. In those days no one was ashamed of wearing his heart on his sleeve.

Supper would soon be announced, the front door left wide open while the meal went on. After supper the steps would begin to fill up with the visiting neighbours — for in summer the front steps were the drawing-room; chairs and cushions would then be brought out, so that even the sidewalk would be covered, — some of the older men with their chairs tipped back against the tree-box.

Counting the hours that he had spent in his office, — and he had not been

altogether five hours away from his home, — this kind of business life would not make him a millionaire; wouldn't give him one-tenth of a million; did not, probably, give him one-half of that one-tenth; but it gave him rest and the sweet repose of his home and time enough to be gracious and hospitable and courteous to every human being who sought his companionship.

This old fashioned father had time for many other things besides this purblind provincial business life of his. Time for a day's outing with his sons, or a long walk in the country, if he pleased, with his daughters; time for a rubber of whist, or a game of chess in the winter afternoons, with some crony from across the street; time for his books, — the whole family reading, — the room quiet as the library of a modern club; time to look after the purchasing of supplies for his house-

hold, and the care of his servants; mindful of their welfare, being interested in their families and the raising of their children, even when they left him and had homes of their own outside his roof. Time to serve his city and his State, as juror or guardian, and his church — the older men being vestrymen and the younger serving in the Sunday schools. What he lived for was his family; anything that might lead him from this object he rejected as not worth the price it would cost him.

Again my restless search-light sweeps over the intermediate years, and again I select a contrasting type, — a type which is increasing over the length and breadth of the land as our ever increasing commercial supremacy asserts itself.

This type lived in a Western city, where he accumulated forty millions of dollars, — a man among his fellows, a

power in the commercial world. Half a dozen like him could own a State, — would have done so in old baronial days, perhaps will yet. Starting life on a farm, he had worked his way up, seizing the opportunities offered every American boy, and at sixty years of age was about to drop into his grave prematurely worn out in the struggle. Two years before the final collapse his physician said to him:

"You must stop work, or I cannot answer for your life. Everything needs rest, — heart, nerves, brain, and body."

The millionaire was seated in his office at the time, from the window of which he could overlook the yards blocked with crunching cars and the clouds of sooty smoke rising from the chimneys, and where every breath of the summer air was filled with the stench of boiling vats.

"Give up business! Why, man,

you're crazy! What would you have me do?"

"Any one of a dozen things."

"Name them."

"Stock your private car; get together a few of your friends, and go out West and shoot some prairie-chickens."

"Oh, that don't appeal to me. I haven't had a gun in my hands since I was a boy. Besides, — nobody has time to go with me."

"Well, then, buy a few hundred acres of land and begin raising some fine stock, — that's interesting for a man like you who knows good cattle, and it will be profitable, too."

The millionaire tapped his desk with the end of his pencil, and said slowly, as he looked out upon the desolate yard:

"No, that's not in my line. Don't want to live in the country — too lonely."

The doctor leaned back in his chair, thought a moment, and struck another lead:

"Why not try orchids? They are a most interesting study. Hunt for them all over the world. Cost a lot of money, but you've got that."

"Orchids? What are orchids?"

"Rare tropical air-plants, beautiful in colour and of endless variety. You've seen them a dozen times in the florists' windows, but you may not have noticed them carefully."

Again the pencil beat a tattoo.

"That might do for a woman, but it wouldn't suit me. Great deal of trouble raising flowers. No, I guess not, doctor."

"Well, then, begin collecting books and pictures; you can spend a million in pictures very easy, and there is nothing gives a man so much pleasure once he gets interested in collecting."

"Oh! I don't know anything about pictures. Have to hire somebody to pick 'em out. Books are all right, but I never get much time to read. Have to grow up to that, and I've always had to work."

The doctor began pacing the floor. The case was an urgent one; relief from the daily strain must come at once.

"Tell me, then," he said, "what you do like to do. You've got to stop this. What else will you take up?"

"What do I like to do, doctor? I like to get up at seven in the morning, eat my breakfast, read the paper for ten minutes, get to my office at half-past eight, open my letters, attend to what business comes up, go to the club for lunch, back to the office, and up-town. After dinner I have a cigar and go to bed. That's what I've been doing all my life; that's what I'm accustomed to, and that's what I like."

"Poor devil!" I said to myself, when the doctor finished telling me the story, — "Poor, miserable, God-forsaken pauper! Bankrupt of everything in life but his balances. Marley's ghost was weighed down with fewer chains, cash-boxes, and money-bags than this poor creature. Flowers might bloom, brooks sing in the sunlight, cool winds steal through silent forests; there was fishing and hunting, golf, horseback-riding, pictures, books, curios, — any number of personal pleasures, — not to take into account the thousand of ways open to him to relieve the sufferings of the unfortunate. None of all that for him! He must continue to wear the same Chinese shoe he had put on when a boy. It had warped and stifled and cramped his growth; slowly and gradually it had crushed every impulse outside of his daily task, and strangled every taste. At twenty there was a

buoyancy in his step; life was before him; he would make the money fast, then he would enjoy it. At thirty he was still pegging away, — no time for pleasure. At forty the million came, and with it the craving for another. At fifty his name stood highest in the Street; at fifty, also, he had lost all his earlier good intentions. At sixty came the end.

Never once in all his life had he had any fun. The newspapers commented on the number of men he had employed; of the mouths he had fed; of his donations to current charities. One critic ended a long editorial with the remark: "He was the type of man whose efforts have made us the greatest commercial power on the earth. Of such is the Kingdom of America!" Not one of them made any reference to his whole-souled cheeriness, to his buoyant temperament, to his love of

giving; to the wide circle of intimate friends that loved him for himself. Even yellow journalism stopped short when they approached that phase of his career.

As for me, I thought of the sons who had raised themselves, — pretty bad raising it was in two instances; of the wife he had neglected; of the hours wasted in filling a tin box in a bank's vault, never seen but twice a year, when he or his clerk cut off coupons, and many of them never taken from the coffin holding his earlier aspirations; of his narrow, commonplace, treadmill life, — a life without colour and totally devoid of charm.

This man, perhaps, is an extreme type, but he is a type that is still held in high esteem by many of our progressive young men. Not all of these would-be followers start out to toe-mark his steps. Many of them intend

to possess themselves of an equal amount of money, although determined to lead a different life in obtaining it. Thousands of our modern homes are founded with this idea in full view, and up to a certain point the fathers of these homes succeed in carrying out these ideas. Then comes the many temptations that beset a progressive business man full of energy, full of brains, and full of the initiative. Gradually the hours of work are lengthened, the brain is subjected to new strains; the much coveted financial position cannot be reached except through herculean efforts; this directorship, or the control of that corporation, or that company, cannot pass into his hands without this or that supreme sacrifice. The family or friend must wait, so must books and foreign travel, and idle days by the brook, or with the dog and gun. At fifty, he says to himself, "I will

soon be free to do as I please, — the girls and the boys, or the wife and I will have our fun then." When the strain becomes more tense and some small strand in his rope snaps, — his nerves, or his brain, or his lungs, — he will stop and look about him. To his horror he is in a quicksand up to his neck, the blue sky above him, *just where it has always been*, the green fields about him, the birds singing, — but, and here is the pity of it, — everything is out of his reach except the mud he clings to and which is slowly engulfing him! One consolation is his, and one only, — the tin box at the bank is full.

What pitfalls would he have avoided in life, had he been so fortunate as to have had one of those old fashioned mothers, and, better still, had he listened to her advice, as did a lad in an old fashioned town, who went to work

when he was sixteen years of age, and whom I knew when I was a boy. His father's money having given out at the time the boy was getting ready for college, this lad took a position at fifty dollars a year.

His work was the tying up of iron rods, marking boxes of hardware, packing shovels and scythes, rolling them out on the sidewalk, and helping load them on the drays that carried them to the steamboats and railroad stations. In the busy season, — that is, in the spring and fall, — the boy got up at five o'clock in the morning, was at the store at seven, and returned home often as late as midnight. In the summer and winter he worked only from nine until five.

The boy and the boy's mother were chums — had been chums for years, ever since the boy began to talk. The mother understood the boy and the boy

understood the mother. She got out of bed when the boy got up, sat by him while he ate his breakfast, and never closed her eyes until he came home, no matter how late, then she kissed him good-night.

The harder he worked the better the mother liked it, and the better she loved him. He had been lazy and inclined to be luxurious, his home affording him all the comforts. He was also a little proud and sometimes put on airs of superiority, and at heart was conceited. Moreover, he seemed to have a certain definite taste for music; this last the mother did not encourage, — not while he was yet a boy. The hard work took these imperfections out of him as a sweat clears the pores of impurity. The mother watched the process, and a new song rose in her heart.

When the end of the first year came, it was in July and in the dull season,

his salary, as was the custom in those days, was paid in one lump — fifty dollars, all in good bank-notes. The boy smoothed the money out on his knee, rolled the bills together, tucked the wad into his inside pocket, buttoned his jacket close, and went home to see his mother, — on his toes! whistling as if he had caught a rabbit and couldn't wait until he had told somebody.

The mother was waiting at the front door. She had seen him from the window skipping along, his face all aflame with joy, and she instantly divined the cause. Putting her arms about him, she led him into her room:

"Have they paid you, my boy?"

"Yes, fifty whole dollars; look at it," and he laid the roll of bills in her hand.

"Aren't you proud, my son?"

"Yes." The boy's eyes snapped.

" What are you going to do with it? "

This mother was a wise woman; she knew the boy and the boy's nature. He was a plant she had nurtured, giving him sunshine and shade as he thrived best. She knew, too, his tastes, — those born in him and as yet dormant. These he might develop later in life, but not now when his character was forming, so she continued to look into his eyes, his hand in hers, and as the boy hesitated she repeated the question:

" What are you going to do with it, son? "

" Well, mother, I don't exactly know. I've had a hard winter's work, and I'm pretty tired out. I think, if you'll let me, I'd like to have a holiday."

" Where will you go? " She still held his hand, her eyes fixed on his.

" Well, I've never been away from home. I'd like to run over to Wash-

ington and see the Capitol; then I'd like to go up into Carroll County and stay with the old farmer who brings us butter."

"Will they let you go at the store?"

"Yes, for two weeks."

"Go, my son, — go and give yourself a trip. That's what money is for. You've worked for it, and it's yours; don't worry if you spend every cent of it. Pack your things and start tomorrow."

The lad has grown up, and the dear mother is with the angels, but the words still ring in the boy's ears. They shaped and dominated his whole life. "Give yourself a trip, my son." Not, put it away in the bank, or loan it out at interest, or buy yourself a gun or a new suit of clothes or a toy, — "Give yourself a trip." In your journey through life work with all your might;

then, when the year is up, take part of your pay, — all of it, if necessary, — and enjoy the things which the good God has given you free of cost — the blue skies, singing brooks, cool, silent forest; lie on the grass, sleep, swim, get saturated with the open; then, refreshed, illumined, and made over new, go back to your work again.

The advice I know is against the trend of the times.

"You want a week off, do you, young man?" said a dried codfish with a backbone of red tape. "Do you know that I've been in charge of this business for forty-three years and never yet took a holiday?"

"Stuff and nonsense, this going away for a rest!" answered a millionaire, — many times a millionaire. "I can always be found at my office, sir, — every day in the year."

He could be, — I found him there

myself, sitting at a fifteen-dollar desk, behind a wooden partition in which was cut a small square hole. On the desk before him lay a second-hand envelope, one turned inside out; he never wasted anything. On this he was recording with the stub of a pencil the " puts and calls " he was hourly trading in, the records of which were being dropped in through the square hole in the partition. It was August, I remember; the leaves of the half-starved trees in the churchyard next his office hung limp. The air was dead, almost unbreathable; the asphalt showed the indent of tire and horse-shoe. The doctrine of " Take a trip, my son," had never been preached to this machine man. " Keep at work and save it! Keep at work and save it! Lay it up for a rainy day! " was what he had heard from his boyhood up. As if a rainy day could ever come to a

live, alert, clear-brained, able-bodied, healthy American boy.

The advice of this old-fashioned mother translated into a modern phrase might read, " Work, earn money, and play." The play covers a wide range. What it shall be depends upon your tastes. It may be reading and collecting of books, or a love for beautiful curios, the pursuit of music, the making of pictures, or the modelling of statues. Or it may reach out along the line of scientific research. But whatever your hand finds to do in these directions, and whatever your soul loves best, hold on to it, and in the holding on don't fail to give the earning of money its proper share; but don't give it *one iota more, or you rob yourself of your just rights.* As a man needs one-third of the twenty-four hours in which to sleep, so he needs one-third of the year for play. He can take it in a

lump by a trip abroad, or he can take it from Friday until Monday every week in the year, but let him take it; let him insist upon it, let him fight for it if need be.

This will often entail sacrifices. A four months' trip every year is often an expensive outing for a business man, not for what it costs, but for what is lost at home by his going. This rises up as an obstacle; sometimes it appears insurmountable. Stop, then, and hold a consultation with yourself. Say to yourself: This year is but one of the many of my life; in the average it will not count. If I break the rule of my going, I break the spell of the pleasure of going, and worse than all, it makes it the harder to get away the next year. Here comes the supreme test, — a test which so many of our young business men fail to pass even when they have determined to carry out this new theory

of work and play. So they hesitate and are lost. Shake yourself up with an outing every month, if need be, or you may wake up some day to find yourself behind a partition scribbling away on the back of an envelope, the thermometer at ninety, and you worth one hundred and eighty millions of dollars.

The time to begin, however, is not when your mould is set, but when that first money is earned, — *your* first money; and the first outing was possible, not when you are lashed fast to your habits and to your gold,— gray, shrivelled, out of touch with the world and the world out of touch with you.

"Take a trip, my son! Take a trip!"

This habit of enforced play will not hurt the American boy. Slothfulness is not characteristic of our lads. Money is too easy to make and success too

alluring. Even the newsboys that grow up between the cobbles have opportunities and futures greater than some princes of the blood. What is more to be feared is that they will become so inoculated with the poison of money as to destroy their taste for everything except the pecuniary rewards it brings.

Let us drop the mother and her teachings and again revert to the old fashioned father. Is there nothing in his personality and his business methods, — a life laughed at and despised by many a "Hustler" (admirable word) of to-day, — which we can follow? Was his life a dull one, according to the best ideals of the best-thinking minds, or is his life and that of his family dull only to us of to-day, and if so, what has brought us to believe that our present ideals, exemplified in hurry and hustle and what is called "up-to-

dateness," is the true formula by which we can obtain happiness and the one the world should live by?

Take his courtesy, for instance, — a courtesy which was part of his education, — studied, perhaps, from his father before him and practised in all its details, that he might hand it down to his son. No business in life was too important to necessitate the suspension of these courtesies. They were his personal right as well as they were his friends'. To be forgetful of them hurt the man offending more than the man slighted. For these were the times when men raised their hats and stood with bared heads before men as well as women. Such elaborate courtesies are laughed at to-day, — "a man of the old school," we sometimes say, and smile with a certain inward pity at the old fellow so behind the times, and so far from being up-to-date. We of

to-day have got better sense than to keep a busy man standing to listen to well-meant inquiries about the people at home, or his affairs. What he wants is a nod and a word, or just a silent bob of the head, or the touch of a hat-brim with one's forefinger. You haven't any more time, and he hasn't any more time. The greatest courtesy you can show him is to let him alone. When he wants to see you he will appoint a time, — at dinner with ten other men you never saw before, or at the Club, where he will order the cocktails, or at his office, where he will listen to you with one ear, the other given to his clerks whispering the fluctuations of the market. It is in this way that we console ourselves for a lack of what in the old days would be looked upon as but common decencies.

And yet, excuse it as we may, the fact still remains that we live in an age

of bad manners, — or, to be closer to the fact, that we live in an age of no manners at all. Nor is it confined to any one class. A woman in diamonds and laces, chattering in her opera box, thus robbing everybody around her of the price they have paid for their seats, is no less a vulgarian than the man who crowds a working-girl in a street-car, or the conductor who upbraids her because she doesn't move up or get off or on to suit him.

Is it any wonder, then, with these old standards gone and this new selfish independence and self-assertive vulgarity taking its place, that even our servants and working people should look upon the commonest civility as beneath their dignity and importance, — or that the foreigner just landed becomes equally boorish. It takes less than thirty days to turn a modest, respectful, obedient servant-girl, just

landed from a ship, into a person of such importance that she dares not be polite for fear she will be considered a greenhorn. Indeed, extreme courteousness is in some of our so-called higher circles considered a sign of social inferiority.

"They were from out of town," a young married woman said at a luncheon, "and so polite. Why, they overwhelmed me with their kindness."

"Couldn't have been anybody," remarked her companion. "I'm always suspicious of people who are too polite."

"I never take off my hat to any man," said a Western drummer to me in a smoking-car. "I'm as good as anybody, and he's as good as me. What's the use of being a dude?"

"If you please, does this train go to Boston?" asked a misguided, old fashioned gentleman (I was the O. F.

gentleman) in the Providence depot, of a bebuttoned and becapped official.

"Naw," blurted out the paid servant of the corporation, — paid to be courteous as well as efficient.

"Can you tell me at what hour it will arrive?"

"Naw — ask him," and he jerked his head in the direction of another Chesterfield.

"Say, but don't get dizzy over it," said a man in a smoking-car to another who had inadvertently blown the ashes from his cigar into his companion's face. "That's all right; you didn't mean it, and there ain't no use 'pologizing."

"But there is," answered the unconscious offender (it was another O. F. G. this time, not I), "I apologize not only for your sake but for mine. I would be most uncomfortable if I thought I had been rude to you and had

not made amends." It was a new doctrine to the man who got the ashes in his face.

How many hot-boxes would be avoided, how much friction lessened, and how much smoother and pleasanter would be our lives, if more of this kind of oil was poured on our axles.

That this almost universal insolence is due in a great measure to a mistaken idea as to what constitutes American freedom, does not help the situation. And it is not confined to our working people. They are, in fact, often more polite than their richer countrymen.

Who, then, I ask, will furnish us with a standard of manners when these old-time gentlemen are all gone, — and they are fast passing away? Certainly not that millionaire of the Western city, nor his sons, nor his intimates and associates. Will civility and courtesy,

gentle talk and witty conversation, self-effacement (never speaking of your own affairs, but always of your friend's) be entirely a thing of the past, or will we ever return to the standards of our fathers?

The amazing thing in the situation is the patience of the populace, or shall I say the feebleness of their protests, not only against these vulgarities, but against all the ills that modern civilization has brought upon us. When they do speak out, it is, nine times out of ten, only in the form of regret, followed by an acquiescence and ending in the acceptance of the new conditions without further murmur. They not only willingly lie in the bed they have made, but they eat the cake of fraud with equanimity, no matter what it contains. That many of the magnates of to-day adulterate their baking-powder with ground rock, their butter with lard,

their raspberry jam with gelatine and aniline dyes, and even their early spring peas, fresh from the can, with copperas, is, of course, a cause of regret to some of us, but nobody seems anxious to break the head of the manufacturer who profits by the fraud, though he poisons us and our families. Better leave it to the legislature and an investigating committee.

Returning again to the modern millionaire and more particularly to the use to which he puts his millions, permit me to call your attention to what occurred in a neighbouring city, where, until a few months ago, there existed a small hotel, — small for the mammoth structures of to-day, but large in comparison with the hotels of fifty years ago. In the appointment of its cafés, bar, bedrooms, drawing-rooms, in its cuisine, the quality of its wines,

cigars, and its service and conveniences, this small hotel stood alone as pre-eminently the best hostelry of its kind, or of any other kind, here or abroad. I make this statement knowingly, after personal knowledge of most of the hotels both in our own country and in Europe. In addition to these comforts,— including every appliance which the sanitary engineer or the electrician could furnish, — there was about the old place that which money could not buy: a peculiar polish to the old mahogany tables and chairs, a certain delicious smokiness about the café, and a cosy restfulness which endeared itself to hundreds of its patrons the world over. This patronage was liberal and generous; had been continued for years by those who were able to pay the highest prices for what they wanted; and the business in consequence became a financial success, — so much so

that it was difficult to get a room, even if ordered a week in advance.

On the adjoining corner there stood another hotel, — a large, imposing structure, five times as big as the smaller and older one, although both were under the same management. No *habitué* of the latter ever entered the larger one if it was possible to get into the smaller; they loved the old place, and it loved them. With the building of a monster structure in New York, — also under the same management, — some new ideas popped into the heads of the owners of these properties. They began to make figures on the backs of envelopes. These proved that if a hotel with thirty rooms and one elevator could earn ten per cent on one-third of a million dollars, a hotel with three hundred rooms and four elevators could earn twenty per cent on five millions.

Plans were accordingly drawn and contracts were let. Presto! Down comes the larger hotel, up goes another monster in its place, on the same site, and precisely like all the other monstrosities in the large cities the world over, — gilt, glare, electric dazzle, palms, stuffy carpets, stuffy lounges, portières, hangings, and department store *bric-à-brac*. Click! Bang! and up you go fourteen stories.

This conglomerate mass of discomfort complete, the little hotel closed its doors, and the patrons of years went out in the cold, and will stay out, for its like will never, never come again.

Why? I ask. What for? What good has come of it? What part of the human body is better taken care of in the new than in the old? Where comes the benefit?

"What good has come of it all, do you ask, my dear sir?" they answer in

the peculiar vernacular of our time. How absurd the question! "This is an age of progress; we are put here to expand, and we will expand if we have to build hotels so high that their roofs are lost in a blue haze. Traditions, reverence for old things, love of a quiet life, are out-of-date. Down with that old-fashioned nonsense! Turn on another burner, — a million burners if necessary. Start a band, — two bands, — one all strings and the other all brass; keep them pounding away so that not a soul in the dining-room can hear themselves speak; crowd in fifty second-hand canvasses in expensive gold frames; hang them under the blazing bulbs; put everybody in uniform; bring in the telegraph stations, post-offices, ticket agencies, and let her go! We've got the bulge on the universe, and don't you forget it! We are *it!*"

We may well ask ourselves then the question, Will those wholesome days ever come back? No, I answer, not while we keep up the pace at which we are moving. But if they ever do I say to you in all sincerity, it must be through that fresh crop of young men who year after year leave our colleges and schools, and in whose keeping rests the future of our country. Only with their help can the water be turned back into the old channels, back to a clearer understanding of what life really means, to the courtesy of the old days, with a better recognition of what the other fellow is entitled to, not as his right so much as our own. Back to the reverence for old age, — the son helping the father first and himself afterwards, — an almost unheard-of thing nowadays, — forgetting the long hours the old man worked to keep him clothed and fed. Back to a higher appreciation of

women, — of their conditions, of their struggles for bread, of their daily fight for place among the competitors who begrudge them their bare existence. Back to a sense of justice toward children, — a willingness to give them the short play-time of their lives, filling their frail fingers with flowers instead of spindles.

The old fashioned folk stood for all these things fifty years ago. They were poor compared with the rich of to-day, — of little influence in corporations, of less in matters of manufacture, but they were courteous, just to their fellow men, simple in their tastes, loyal to their old fashioned ideas of honesty between man and man; gallant to their women, sparing of their children, — and above all else possessed of that priceless jewel — CONTENTMENT.

OF THIS FIRST EDITION OF OLD FASHIONED FOLK, BY F. HOPKINSON SMITH, SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES, OF WHICH FIFTY COPIES ARE RESERVED FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION, HAVE BEEN PRINTED FROM TYPE UPON ENGLISH HANDMADE PAPER AT THE COLONIAL PRESS, BOSTON, DURING THE MONTH OF APRIL, 1907.

Absolutely Good

The "Conversation" dried somewhat.